



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

November 2, 2004

Ms. Carol Longoria  
Public Information Coordinator  
The University of Texas System  
210 West Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2004-9340

Dear Ms. Longoria:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 212104.

The University of Texas at Austin (the "university") received a request for "a copy of bid tabulations for gasoline, diesel fuel, and biodiesel from [the university's] last awarded bid along with a copy of the awarded vendor's bid and copies of four recent invoices for gasoline, diesel fuel, and biodiesel from [the university's] current supplier." Although you assert that the submitted information may be excepted from disclosure under various provisions of the Public Information Act (the "Act"), you take no position and make no arguments regarding these exceptions. Instead, pursuant to section 552.305, you have notified Gold Star Petroleum, Inc. ("Gold Star") of the request and of its opportunity to submit comments to this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure in certain circumstances). We have considered Gold Star's arguments and have reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the university's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. Pursuant to section 552.301(b), a governmental body must ask the attorney general for a decision as to whether requested information must be disclosed not later than the tenth business day after the date of receiving the written request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Section 552.301(e) requires the governmental body to submit to the attorney general, not later than the fifteenth business day after the date of its receipt of the request, (1) written comments stating why the governmental body's claimed exceptions apply to the information that it seeks to withhold; (2) a copy of the written request for information; (3) a signed statement of the date on which the governmental

body received the request, or evidence sufficient to establish that date; and (4) the specific information that the governmental body seeks to withhold or representative samples of the information if it is voluminous. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A)-(D). You acknowledge that the university failed to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 of the Government Code.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information at issue is public and must be released. A governmental body must release information presumed public under section 552.302, unless it demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information. *See Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling interest exists when some other source of law makes the information confidential or third party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). Because the university indicates that release of the submitted information may implicate third party interests, which can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will address Gold Star's claims.

Gold Star claims that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.104 of the Government Code. We note, however, that section 552.104 only protects the interests of governmental bodies, not those of private parties such as Gold Star. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 592 at 8 (1991) (governmental body may waive section 552.104). Section 552.104 excepts information from disclosure if a governmental body demonstrates that the release of the information would cause potential specific harm to the governmental body's interests in a particular competitive situation. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 593 at 2 (1991), 463 (1987), 453 at 3 (1986). The university has not argued that the release of requested information would harm its interests in a particular competitive situation under section 552.104. Therefore, the requested information may not be withheld pursuant to section 552.104.

Gold Star also raises section 552.110 of the Government Code, which protects the proprietary interests of private persons by excepting from disclosure two types of information: (1) trade secrets obtained from a person and privileged or confidential by statute or judicial decision and (2) commercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the information was obtained. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(a), (b).

The Texas Supreme Court has adopted the definition of a "trade secret" from section 757 of the Restatement of Torts, which holds a "trade secret" to be

any formula, pattern, device or compilation of information which is used in one's business, and which gives [one] an opportunity to obtain an advantage over competitors who do not know or use it. It may be a formula for a chemical compound, a process of manufacturing, treating or preserving materials, a pattern for a machine or other device, or a list of customers. It differs from other secret information in a business in that it is not simply information as to a single or ephemeral event in the conduct of the business, as for example the amount or other terms of a secret bid for a contract or the salary of certain employees . . . . A trade secret is a process or device for continuous use in the operation of the business . . . . [It may] relate to the sale of goods or to other operations in the business, such as a code for determining discounts, rebates or other concessions in a price list or catalogue, or a list of specialized customers, or a method of bookkeeping or other office management.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Hyde Corp. v. Huffines*, 314 S.W.2d 763, 776 (Tex. 1958), *cert. denied*, 358 U.S. 898 (1958). In determining whether particular information constitutes a trade secret, this office considers the Restatement's definition of trade secret, as well as the Restatement's list of six trade secret factors.<sup>1</sup> RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939). This office has held that if a governmental body takes no position with regard to the application of the trade secret branch of section 552.110 to requested information, we will accept a private person's claim for exception as valid under that branch if that person establishes a *prima facie* case for the exception and no argument is submitted that rebuts the claim as a matter of law. *See Open Records Decision No. 552 at 5-6 (1990)*. However, we cannot conclude that section 552.110(a) applies unless it has been shown that the information meets the definition of a trade secret, and the necessary factors have been demonstrated to establish a trade secret claim. *See Open Records Decision No. 402 (1983)*.

Section 552.110(b) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[c]ommercial or financial information for which it is demonstrated based on specific factual evidence that disclosure would cause substantial competitive harm to the person from whom the

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<sup>1</sup> The six factors that the Restatement gives as indicia of whether information constitutes a trade secret are:

- (1) the extent to which the information is known outside of [the company];
- (2) the extent to which it is known by employees and others involved in [the company's] business;
- (3) the extent of measures taken by [the company] to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) the value of the information to [the company] and [its] competitors;
- (5) the amount of effort or money expended by [the company] in developing the information;
- (6) the ease or difficulty with which the information could be properly acquired or duplicated by others.

RESTATEMENT OF TORTS § 757 cmt. b (1939); *see also Open Records Decision Nos. 319 at 2 (1982), 306 at 2 (1982), 255 at 2 (1980)*.

information was obtained.” Gov’t Code § 552.110(b). This exception to disclosure requires a specific factual or evidentiary showing, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that substantial competitive injury would likely result from release of the information at issue. *Id.*; see also Open Records Decision No. 661 at 5-6 (1999). We also note that pricing information of a winning bidder is generally not excepted under section 552.110(b). See Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors).

Upon review, we find that Gold Star has not established that any of the submitted information qualifies as a trade secret under 552.110(a) or that release of any of this information would cause Gold Star substantial competitive injury, as required by section 552.110(b). Therefore, none of the responsive information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.110. See Open Records Decision No. 509 at 5 (1988) (stating that because costs, bid specifications, and circumstances would change for future contracts, assertion that release of bid proposal might give competitor unfair advantage on future contracts was entirely too speculative); cf. Open Records Decision No. 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors). Thus, the submitted information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free,

at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Debbie K. Lee  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

DKL/seg

Ref: ID# 212104

Enc. Submitted documents

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